

# The Robert Ogden School

The Robert Ogden School, Clayton Lane, Thurnscoe, Rotherham, South Yorkshire  
S63 0BG

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

The Robert Ogden School is an independent school managed by the National Autistic Society (NAS). The school has capacity for 127 children with special educational needs, who are between the ages of five and 19, and who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). There are currently 111 children on roll and 10 of these use the residential provision, known as Thurnscoe House and Studios. In total, 10 pupils can board on any one night – six in the house and another four in the studios. Currently, three pupils board for four nights a week from Monday to Thursday and another seven are flexible boarders.

The school uses the framework developed by the NAS to understand and support pupils with ASD. This framework also underpins the ASD-specific training that all staff receive. All pupils have an individual education, health and care plan (EHC plan).

The school was awarded advanced status of the Autism Accreditation scheme by the NAS in April 2019.

The care of residential pupils is supported by the on-site personal support team, which provides specialist occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and psychological and behavioural support.

The head of care came into post in September 2019 and has a level 5 qualification in care and leadership.

**Inspection dates:** 2 to 3 December 2019

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly

improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 12 November 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Children make excellent progress from their starting points, supported through a sophisticated multi-disciplinary approach. Comprehensive plans help them to develop skills and confidence in all aspects of their lives. Some children have made exceptional progress and are operating at a level beyond expectations.

Prior to staying in residence, some children could not recognise and verbally communicate their feelings. Those children are now able to do so by using a range of communication aids and talking to staff. Children whose lives were limited by the very rigid rules they lived by are now able to enjoy greater freedoms. Children can make choices about many aspects of their lives, from attending their annual reviews to what they want to prepare and eat for their tea.

Children thoroughly enjoy their time in residence and stay in accommodation that is highly suited to their needs. Each child uses their personal space, a roomy and comfortable bedroom with ensuite facilities, to pursue their own interests and activities, and have time away from others. The remarkable ease with which children who are new to the school settle into their new bedroom space is evidence that staff help them to create a space that they value and recognise as their own.

The more able children who use the studio accommodation develop independence skills in their own kitchenette, which they use to make their own breakfast and snacks. They enjoy their personal living area to pursue their individual interests and this is a valuable part of their life-skills learning.

Children's progress is measured in accredited programmes for life skills. Their residential targets are drawn from their EHC plan and this ensures that the areas for their development are related to their wishes and aspirations, which are reported on and reviewed annually. Opportunity for continued skill growth is evident. For example, one child has moved from engaging in no organised activity to choosing one activity per term, then two activities per week, and now a specific activity to develop her physical skills. These opportunities allow children to develop at their own pace, experience success and be prepared for further challenge, while protecting their feelings of security and self-esteem.

Staff focus on what children want and need and do their best to help children to access broad and enriching experiences. Few of the children will be able to access regular employment or higher education and staff recognise that they can provide opportunities for children to develop vocational skills and experiences to support them when they leave.

The enterprise schemes organised by staff have provided exceptional opportunities in this area, for example by widening children's horizons to think about animal welfare and homelessness. Projects are driven by what children want to contribute. For example, children created a basket of dog food as well as a food parcel for a homeless person's shelter, because they recognised that when they see homeless

people they often also own dogs. Children develop their practical skills by making and selling bookmarks and Lego clocks to raise money for the projects. This brings about a greater understanding of the wider world; it inspires the children to explore and understand worlds outside their own, brings them into positive contact with local community groups and builds their self-esteem.

Parents say that their children are learning essential skills for life, and that academic achievement, while important, is complemented by their children's increasing levels of independence and self-regulation. This enables the children to access more opportunities for community and family integration and improves their emotional well-being.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding**

Safeguarding is given a high priority in the school and the wider organisation.

Appropriate and timely action is taken when there is a cause for concern. The school makes good use of links with the local authority designated officer and other multi-agency partners.

The NAS provides opportunities for regular dissemination on safeguarding-related concerns. The NAS has equipped all schools, including this one, with a briefing and training materials for staff to explore with children the messages from the recent Panorama television programme on children with ASD living in special hospitals.

The designated safeguarding leads and the staff are well trained on safeguarding matters, and the training is currently under review to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. It has been recognised that staff require regular updates in smaller 'bitesize' sessions on safeguarding to keep their knowledge fresh and up to date.

The staff are experienced and know the children. They can anticipate their behaviour and recognise the triggers and know the strategies to keep them safe. This means that children grow in their ability to withstand the problems and anxieties they experience, use alternative means of coping with them, and make choices that are less harmful to themselves and those around them.

Staff promote a calm, nurturing environment where there is minimal use of restraint, and sanctions are not imposed. There is evidence that children's levels of anxiety and self-harming behaviours have reduced over time. All behaviour is monitored, and staff have access to on-site support from trained consultants, community services such as the child and adolescent mental health services, and specialists from within the wider organisation. When children become 'stuck' or show signs of significant change, there is opportunity for immediate consultation with staff at the NAS to try to help and support staff at the school with the most difficult situations. Staff are constantly exploring possible triggers for behaviours and are relentless in trying to understand why children behave in the way that they do. Through the inspection, the managers have reflected and discussed their plans to demonstrate how they can work even more effectively to ensure that the low arousal responses remain effective for all children in regulating their behaviours, particularly those whose behaviours

hurt staff.

Children receive excellent individualised support and staff access external and community support when additional needs are identified. Introduction of the complementary therapies programme to explore additional ways of reducing anxiety levels recognises the way the school continually seeks to improve children's lives.

The arrangements for recruitment and selection of staff are very thorough and exceed the statutory requirements. Extensive enquiries of an applicant's background ensure that only suitable staff are employed. The school goes to great lengths to ensure that prospective staff know the demands of the role and the pressures of working with children who have ASD. This ensures that staff are well supported through their induction and probation and are more likely to remain at the school. The school has recognised that it would be difficult for children to be personally involved in the recruitment of new staff. Children have made short videos which are shown to candidates. Through the videos, the children ask insightful questions. This is a valuable and meaningful part of the recruitment process. This is exceptional practice.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

Since the last inspection, the new head of care has come into post and inherited a staff team which has vacancies and elements of low morale. Although steps have been taken to resolve the staff vacancies through the recruitment of new staff and use of education staff, there are no concrete plans in place should the current arrangements cease to be effective.

Staff are supported through a comprehensive training programme that consists of blended learning, including face-to-face and online training. Staff are monitored through effective evaluation, observation and reflection. The training programme, and additional support, enable staff to make good progress in understanding the skills needed to support children well. Staff quickly acquire the skills required through professional reflection, effective modelling of good practice from managers and enhanced research-based ASD-specific approaches to understand children's needs.

Staff receive annual appraisals, the opportunity to attend organisational learning events, reflective supervision and bespoke training events. All staff are required to complete the level 3 diploma, which includes face-to-face training and assessed observed practice, as part of their conditions of employment and work in an environment of learning and development. There is a programme in place for aspiring managers, which ensures that there are career development opportunities. This also promotes the retention of staff.

Multiple monitoring systems are in place. Monitoring is undertaken by a range of people from the wider organisation, the external visitor and staff in the residential accommodation. Although there is a great deal of activity, this does not always ensure that staff have the most up-to-date information they require to carry out their work well. The wealth of information held in the residential accommodation does not accurately tell the story of all children. As staff know the children well, this does not affect their practice, but collating the information takes up considerable time with

limited results, and its incompleteness prevents the managers from taking forward their creative and interesting plans to improve the service even more.

## **What does the residential special school need to do to improve?**

### **Points for Improvement**

- Keep under review the low arousal responses to children's behaviour to ensure that they remain effective in all situations. (NMS 12.4)
- Develop effective contingency plans to ensure that there are enough staff until the staff vacancies are filled. (NMS 15.7)
- Review all the monitoring and recording systems to ensure that they are effective and avoid duplication. (NMS 13.8)

### **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

## **Residential special school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC473713

**Head of care:** Emma Knott

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspectors**

Helen Humphreys: Social Care HMI (lead)

Denise Jolly: Social Care Inspector





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